

BOOK REVIEW

BIRDS, BEASTS & BUREAUCRATS: A NATURALIST ON A CARIBBEAN ISLAND.—Herbert A. Raffaele. 2007. Cold Tree Press, Nashville, Tennessee. 256 pp. ISBN: 978-1-58385-111-1. \$13.95.

Herbert A. Raffaele holds the rank of hero to most members of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, primarily because he was the chief force behind the publication of *Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* (Raffaele et al. 1998, 2003). Not only did this masterpiece replace the horribly out-of-date *Birds of the West Indies* by James Bond (1985) with a state of the art field guide, but the artwork was made available to other island ornithologists for their potential use, which has already resulted in field guides for Hispaniola in both French and Spanish, with hopefully more such local guides on the way.

In *Birds, Beasts & Bureaucrats*, Raffaele explains how a New York City boy with a penchant for studying birds ended up on Puerto Rico, then describes some of his adventures in the field and trials and tribulations working out of the office during a 7-year tour of duty holding several environmental positions within the government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. I could never quite figure out exactly which years were covered, but it seemed to start in the very late 1960s and end sometime in the mid to, perhaps, late 1970s. And while the title suggests his being on a single Caribbean island, much of the material deals with observations taken on islands offshore from Puerto Rico, ranging from tiny Cayo Ratones to Desecheo, Mona, and even Culebra.

Each of the nine chapters tends to focus on either a particular island or a particular creature, although a few chapters discuss multiple creatures or visit two or more islands. Each chapter includes descriptions of his observations of the birds and beasts that make this region distinctive and sometimes detailed stories about how human activities can really disturb these simple island communities. Among animals discussed at some length are manatees, sea turtles, fish-eating bats, introduced monkeys, the golden coqui, and both native and introduced iguanas. Bird stories include many observations on seabird nesting, plus notes on the rediscovery of the Puerto Rican Nightjar (*Caprimulgus noctitherus*), the effects of the Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bo-*

nairiensis) on endemic birds, Raffaele's discovery of many exotic species that had settled on the island, and the discovery of the Elfin Woods Warbler (*Dendroica angelae*) in the Luquillo Mountains. Each chapter ends with a "Reflections" section, where the author editorializes about some of the broader lessons that he had learned from the experiences described in the chapter.

I did my doctoral research on bird communities in the West Indies, so I spent several months working on Puerto Rico and Mona Island during the early and mid 1970s and I continue to monitor bird populations at Guánica annually. Raffaele's descriptions often brought back fond memories of my first discovery of some of Puerto Rico's treasured birds and beasts, and he often provided details to stories I had heard only second or third hand. Both of those experiences from this book were great, but aspects of the book made me uncomfortable at times.

First of all, there is a tremendous time warp involved with this book. The book deals with events from sometime in the 1970s, but it came out in 2007. I don't know if Raffaele wrote the book at that time, then had it published more recently, or if he wrote it recently from his notes and/or memories. In either case, many creature-related stories in the book end in the 1970s, when I know that much has happened since. The author provides a 3-page postscript that seems to be his attempt to provide the reader the current situation, but I found this totally inadequate. For example, the author talks about potentially finding a Puerto Rico Crested Toad (*Bufo lemur*), a species once considered extinct. After long discussions with experts about a positive identification of the species, we are left (I think) with the idea that it was not this species. Yet, the crested toad has been found since then, and there is a great deal of work being done to save this species, including making artificial ponds for reproduction and raising baby toads in zoos in England! The Shiny Cowbird control program in southwest Puerto Rico seems to be helping the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus*) better than implied in the postscript, although there are other species suffering elsewhere. Many of his stories could easily have been brought up to date in a less superficial way than that provided.

My last complaint may also reflect this time warp, as many things certainly have changed in the

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world of conservation during the past 30 years. On several occasions in his "Reflections" sections, Raffaele is highly critical of scientific research and researchers. Early in the book, he suggests that science is out of touch with local conditions and that it is too slow to really help with conservation; rather, we should just do conservation. Later, he is justifiably critical of scientists who collected the last specimens of a species, but has to revert to the 1800s for his examples. Finally, he suggests that the ethics of science is not compatible with a conservation focus, as science is only about hypothesis testing and yields only right or wrong answers. As a researcher, perhaps I am being too sensitive when I am a bit offended by Raffaele's remarks. Once again, though, perhaps his comments reflect the dated nature of aspects of this book. Yes, I was trained to be a researcher and a scientist first, and a conservationist second. But since the 1970s, things have changed dramatically. Fields such as conservation biology have developed in such a way that nearly all of my graduate students not only are trained in research procedures, but they get training in the social and

economic aspects of conservation biology, too. The conservation research world of today is very different from that of the 1970s, and some of the researchers mentioned favorably in this book helped make these changes. In this case, I will forgive Herbert Raffaele his jaded view of modern conservation research and assume it arose from the same part of his brain that made him unable to pack properly for a long field trip.—JOHN FAABORG, *110 Tucker Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211-7400*; email: faaborgj@missouri.edu.

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